

Michael F. Easley  
Governor



## State of North Carolina Office of the Governor

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### **GOV. EASLEY ANNOUNCES STATE AGREES TO PURCHASE GRANDFATHER MOUNTAIN**

**RALEIGH** – Gov. Mike Easley announced today that the state of North Carolina has agreed to purchase Grandfather Mountain, one of the state's premier signature landmarks, in Avery County from the Morton family and Grandfather Mountain Inc. Grandfather Mountain will be North Carolina's 34<sup>th</sup> state park. The agreement sets a purchase price of \$12 million for the 2,601-acre undeveloped portion of the tourist destination as well as a conservation easement on the remaining 604 acres that will be managed through a nonprofit entity by the heirs of Hugh Morton.

"Today Grandfather Mountain and all its scenic beauty becomes a state park, which is one more step in our efforts to be One North Carolina Naturally," said Easley. "This is an extremely important habitat and we will take good care of it. The dreams of many North Carolinians and Hugh Morton will be met: North Carolina will protect and preserve Grandfather Mountain forever."

Funding from the acquisition will come from the N.C. Parks and Recreation Trust Fund and the Natural Heritage Trust Fund. The acquisition was arranged with the help of The Conservation Fund and one of its directors, Mike Leonard, and The Nature Conservancy, which holds conservation easements on Grandfather Mountain and surrounding properties totaling close to 4,000 acres.

The terms of the agreement outline the intent of the Morton family to continue operating the Grandfather Mountain travel attraction, which includes a nature center, seven wildlife habitats and the signature swinging bridge through a nonprofit organization supported by funding from the sale. The N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation will manage the undeveloped portion of Grandfather Mountain, including its 11 trails, as a state park and may seek additional acreage for traditional park facilities. Any additional tracts or facilities would be identified and prescribed through a public master planning process.

Grandfather Mountain has been a wildlife sanctuary and nature preserve for decades, boasting 16 distinct habitats and 73 rare species including the Carolina northern flying squirrel and the Blue Ridge goldenrod. The mountain contains the headwaters of both the Linville and Watauga Rivers and has been the only private park designated by the United Nations as an International Biosphere Reserve.

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"This opportunity completes the protection of all of Grandfather Mountain in perpetuity, as it should be for a place of such significance," said Crae Morton, president of Grandfather Mountain Inc.

“The acquisition of Grandfather Mountain builds on our success at Chimney Rock, which was added to the state parks system last year, and shows again that great things can be accomplished through partnerships and a trust in the conservation spirit of the state’s citizens,” said Lewis Ledford, director of North Carolina State Parks.

Hugh Morton inherited the mountain in 1952 and is credited with developing the park as a tourist destination and endowing it with a strong conservation ethic. Morton died in 2006.

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